THE
Protestant Resolution
OF
FAITH,
Being an Answer to
Three Questions.

I. How far we must depend on the Authority of the Church for the true Sence of Scripture?

II. Whether a Visible Succession from Christ to this day makes a Church, which has this Visible Succession, an Infallible Interpreter of Scripture; And whether no Church, which has not this Succession, can teach the true Sence of Scripture?

III. Whether the Church of *ENGLAND* can make out such a Visible Succession?

by William Sherlock

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THE PREFACE TO THE READER.

THese Papers, which are here presented to thee, were writ for the use of a private Person, and by the Advice of some Friends, are now made publick. We find how busie the Romish *Emissaries are to corrupt our People, and think our selves equally concerned to Antidote them against Popery and Fanaticism: Two Extreams equally dangerous to the Government of Church and State in these Kingdoms, both in their Principles and Practices; and both of them very great Corruptions of the Christian Religion, and very dangerous to mens Souls. Some of our Clergie have already been so charitable to our Dissenters, as to warn them of their danger, and by the Strength and Evidence of Scripture and Reason, to convince them of their Mistakes; and I pray God forgive those men, and turn their Hearts, who will not contribute so much to their own Conviction and Satisfaction, as diligently and impartially to read and consider what is so charitably offered to them. Ignorance and Mistake may excuse men, who have no op-*

portunities of knowing better, but such wilful and resolved Ignorance, which bars up mens minds against all means of better Information, will as soon damn them, as sins against knowledge.

And now it might justly be thought want of Charity to those of the Roman *Communion, should we take no care at all of them; nay, want of Charity to those of our own Communion, and to Dissenters themselves, who are daily assaulted by the busie Factors for* Rome. *For the Disputes against the Church of* Rome, *as well as against Dissenters, are for the most part too Learned, and too Voluminous for the instruction of ordinary people, and therefore some short and plain Discourses about the principal Matters in dispute between us, is the most effectual way we can take to confirm men in their Religion, and preserve them from the crafty Insinuations of such as lie in wait to deceive.*

Some few Attempts, which have been already made of that kind, give me some hope, that several other Tracts will follow, that the Ruine of the Church of England *(if God shall please ever to permit such a thing) whether by Popery, or Fanaticism, may not be charged upon our neglect to instruct People better.*

Some Persons, it seems, whose Talent lies more in censuring what others do, than in doing any good themselves, are pleased to put some sinister Constructions on this Designe; as it is impossible to designe any thing so well, but Men of Ill Minds, who know not what it means to do good, for goods sake, shall be able to find some bad name for it. Some guess that we now write against Popery onely to play an after-game, and to regain the Favour and good Opinion of Dissenters, which we have lost by writing against them: But I know not that any man has

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left their Favour by it, nor that any man values their Favour for any other Reason, than to have the greater advantage of doing them good. If so good a work as confuting the Errors of the Church of Rome *will give the Dissenters such a good Opinion of us, as to make them more impartially consider what has been writ to perswade them to Communion with the Church of* England, *I know no reason any man has to be ashamed to own it, though it were part of his designe; but whether it is or not, is more than I know: I dare undertake for those Persons I am acquainted with, that they neither value the Favour, nor fear the Displeasure either of Fanaticks or Papists, but yet heartily desire to do good to them both.*

But there is a more mischievous Suggestion than this, that the designe of such Papers is onely to raise a new cry and noise about Popery, and to alarm the People, and disturb the Government with new Fears and Jealousies: Truly, if I thought this would be the effect of it, I would burn my Papers presently; for I am sure the Church of England *will get nothing by a Tumultuary and Clamorous Zeal against the Church of* Rome, *and I had much rather suffer under Popery, than contribute any thing towards raising a Popular Fury to keep it out. We profess our selves as irreconcileable Enemies to Popery, as we are to Fanaticism, and desire that all the World may know it; but we will never Rebel, nor countenance any Rebellion against our Lawful Soveraign, to keep out either, we leave such Principles and Practices to Papists and Fanaticks. But when we find our People Assaulted by the Agents of* Rome, *and do not think our selves secure from Popish Designs, we think it our Duty to give them the best Instructions we can to preserve them from such Errors, as we believe will destroy their Souls; and cannot but wonder that any men who are as much concerned to take care of Souls as we are, should think this a needless or a scandalous Undertaking. I wish such men would*

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speak out, and tell us plainly what they think of Popery themselves. If they think this Designe not well managed by those who undertake it, it would more become them to commend the Designe, and do it better themselves; I know no man but would very gladly be excused, as having other work enough to employ his time, but yet I had rather spend my vacant minutes this way, than in censuring the good that other men do, while I do none my self.

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The Words of the Paper, which was sent to me, are these:

IT is my Opinion, that the infinite Goodness of our Legislator, has left to us a means of knowing the true sence and meaning of the Holy Scriptures, which is the Church: Now I judge this Church must be known to be the true Church, by its continual visible Succession from Christ till our Days. But I doubt whether or no the Protestant Church can make out this continual visible Succession, and desire to be informed.

ANSWER.

THAT Christ has left a means of knowing the true sence and meaning of the Holy Scriptures, I readily grant; or else it had been to no purpose to have left us the Scriptures. But the latter Clause is very ambiguous, for the meaning may either be, that we may understand by the Scriptures, which is the Church; or that the Church is the means whereby we must understand the true sence and meaning of the Scripture.

The first is a true Protestant Principle, and therefore I presume not intended by this Objector. For now we should know that there is any Church without the Information we receive by the Scripture, I cannot Divine; and yet we may as easily know that there is a Church, as we can know which is the true Church without the Scripture. For there is no other means of knowing either that there is a Church, or what this Church is, or what are the Properties of a True and Sound and Orthodox Church, but by Revelation, and we have no other Revelation of this, but what is contained in the Holy Scriptures.

As for the Second, That the Church is the means of knowing

ing the true ſence and meaning of the Scriptures, it is in ſome ſence very true, in ſome ſence very falſe.

1. It is in ſome ſence true, and acknowledged by all ſober Proteſtants. As, 1. If by the Church we underſtand the Univerſal Church of all Ages, as we receive the Scriptures themſelves handed down by them to our time, ſo whatever Doctrines of Faith have been univerſally received by them, is one of the beſt means to find out the true ſence of Scripture. For the nearer they were to the times of the Apoſtles, the more likely they were to underſtand the true ſence of their Writings, being inſtructed by the Apoſtles themſelves in the meaning of them. And thus we have a certain Rule to ſecure us from all dangerous Errors in expounding Scripture. For the great and fundamental Doctrines of the Chriſtian Religion, are as plainly contained in the Writings of the firſt Fathers of the Church, and as unanimouſly aſſerted by them, as the Authority of the Scriptures themſelves: And therefore though we have not a Traditionary Expoſition of every particular Text of Scripture; yet we have of the great and fundamental Doctrines of Faith, and therefore muſt never expound Scripture ſo as to contradict the known and avowed ſence of the Catholick Church. And this courſe the Church of *England* takes; ſhe receives the Definitions of the four firſt General Councils, and requires her Biſhops and Clergy to Expound the Scriptures according to the profeſt Doctrines of thoſe firſt and pureſt Ages of the Church.

2. We ought to pay great deference to, and not lightly and wantonly oppoſe the Judgment and Authority of the particular Church wherein we live, when her Expoſitions of Scripture do not evidently and notoriouſly contradict the ſence of the Catholick Church, eſpecially of the firſt and beſt Ages of it. For it does not become private men to oppoſe their Sentiments and Opinions to the Judgment of the Church, unleſs in ſuch plain Caſes, as every honeſt man may be preſumed a very Competent Judge in the matter; and no Church, nor all the Churches in the World have ſuch Authority, that we muſt renounce our Senſes, and deny the firſt principles of Reaſon, to follow them with a blind and implicite Faith.

And thus the Church, that is, the Senſe and Judgment of the Catholick Church, is a means for the finding out the true ſence of Scripture; and though we may miſtake the ſence of ſome

ſome particular Texts, (which the *Romaniſts* themſelves will not deny, but that even infallible Councils may do, who though they are infallible in their Concluſions, yet are not always ſo in the Arguments or Mediums, whether drawn from Scripture or Reaſon, whereby they prove them) yet it is morally impoſſible we ſhould be guilty of any dangerous miſtake, while we make the Catholick Doctrine of the Church our Rule; and in other matters follow the Judgment, and ſubmit to the Authority of the Church wherein we live; which is as abſolutely neceſſary, as Peace and Order, and good Government in the Church.

2. But then this is very falſe, if we mean that the Church is the onely means of finding out the true ſence of the Scriptures; or if by the Church we underſtand any particular Church, as I ſuppoſe this perſon does, the *Roman* Catholick, that is, the particular Univerſal Church of *Rome*; or if we mean the Church of the preſent Age, or by Means underſtand ſuch a Decretory Sentence, as muſt determine our Faith, and command our Aſſent; that we muſt ſeek for no other Reaſon of our Faith, but the Authority of the Church in expounding Scriptures. I ſhall diſcourſe ſomething briefly of each of theſe.

1. To ſay that the Church is the only Means to find out the true ſence of Scripture, is very falſe and abſurd. For, 1. This ſuppoſes the Holy Scriptures to be a very unintelligible Book, which is a great reproach to the Holy Spirit, by which it was Indited, that he either could not, or would not ſpeak intelligible to the World.

2. This is a direct Contradiction to thoſe Exhortations of Chriſt and his Apoſtles to ſtudy the Scriptures, which were made to private men, and therefore neceſſarily ſuppoſes, that the Holy Scriptures are to be underſtood as other Writings are, by conſidering the Propriety of the Words and Language wherein they are written, the Scope and Deſign of the place, and ſuch other means, as honeſt and ſtudious Inquirers uſe to find out the meaning of any other Book.

3. If the Scriptures are ſo unintelligible, that an honeſt man cannot find out the meaning of them, without the infallible interpretation of the Church, I would deſire to know whether Chriſt and his Apoſtles preached intelligibly to their Hearers?

If they did not, to what purpose did they preach at all? By what means were men converted to the Faith? if they did, how comes these Sermons to be so unintelligible now they are written, which were so intelligible when they were spoken? For the Gospels contain a plain History of what Christ did, and of what he said; and the Apostles wrote the same things to the Churches when they were absent, which they preached to them when they were present: and we reasonably suppose, that they as much designed that the Churches should understand what they Wrote, as what they Preached; and therefore that they generally used the same form of words in their Writing and in their Preaching: And this makes it a great Riddle, how one should be very plain and easie to be understood, and the other signifie nothing without an infallible Interpreter.

4. If the Scriptures be in themselves unintelligible, I would desire to know how the Church comes to understand them? If by any humane means, together with the ordinary Assistances of the Divine Spirit, then they are to be understood; and then why may not every Christian, in proportion to his skill in Languages, and in the Rules of Reason and Discourse, understand them also?

If the Church cannot understand the Scriptures by any humane means, but onely by Inspiration, (for there is no Medium between these two) to what purpose were the Scriptures written? For we might as well have learnt the Will of God from the Church, without the Scriptures, as with them. God could have immediately revealed his Will to the Church, without a written Rule, as well as reveal the meaning of that written Rule, which it seems has no signification at all, till the Church, by Inspiration, gives an Orthodox meaning to it.

5. And if we cannot understand the Scriptures, till the Church Expounds them to us, how shall we know which is the Church, and that this Church is such an infallible Interpreter of Scriptures? The Church is to be known onely by the Scriptures, and the Scriptures are to be understood onely by the Church: If we will know the Church, we must first understand the Scriptures; and if we will understand the Scriptures, we must first know the Church; and when both must be known first, or we can know neither, it is impossible in this way, either to understand the Scriptures, or find out the Church.

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For, suppose the Church does expound Scripture by Inspiration, how shall we be assured that it does so? Must we believe every Man, or every Church, which pretends to Inspiration? This is a contradiction to the Apostles Rule, not to believe every Spirit, but to try the Spirits. How then shall they be tryed? I know but two ways, either by Miracles, or by Scripture. Miracles are now ceas'd, unless we will believe some fabulous Legends, which all wise men in the Church of *Rome* are ashamed of; and if there were real Miracles wrought, they are of no Authority against a standing Rule of Faith, which the Apostle calls a more sure word of Prophesie. If then we must judge of these pretences to Revelation by the Scriptures, which is the onely way now left, then there is a way of understanding the Scriptures without this Revelation: for if we must understand the Scriptures by Revelation, and Revelation by the Scriptures, we are got into a new circle, and can understand neither.

Object. But do we not see how many Schisms and Heresies have been occasioned, by suffering every one to Expound Scripture for himself? How many Divisions and Sub-divisions are there among Protestants, who agree in little else, besides their opposition to Popery? And is it possible to cure this, without an Infallible Interpreter of Scriptures? Is it not a contradiction to common Experience, to say, that the sence of Scripture is plain and certain, when so few men can agree what it is?

Answ. 1. Yes, we do see this, and lament it, and are beholden to the Church of *Rome*, and her Emissaries, in a great measure for it. But yet we know, thus it has been in all Ages of the Christian Church, as well as now; and we take the same way to confute these Heresies, and to preserve the Purity of the Faith, and the Unity of the Church, which the Primitive Fathers did, by appealing to Scripture, and the Doctrine and Practice of the Catholick Church, which is the best way any Church can take, when there is no Infallible Judge of Controversies: And if the Primitive Church had known any such Infallible Judge, they would certainly have appealed to him, at one time or other; and it had been impossible, that any Errours or Heresies should for any long time together have disturbed the Church; but we hear nothing of him for many

hundred years after Christ; but the ancient Fathers took the same way to confute the Heresies of their days, which we do now, which is a good probable Argument, that they knew no better. And the present Divisions of the Christian Church, are no greater Argument against us, than the ancient Heresies were against the Primitive Church, or than the Protestant Heresies (as they are pleased to call them) are against the Church of *Rome*: For what advantage has the Church of *Rome* upon this account, above any other Profession of Christians? Those who are of the same Communion, are of the same mind. Thus it is among us, and it is no better among them; for we are no more of their mind, than they are of ours: nay, notwithstanding all their pretences to Infallibility, most of the Disputes which divide the Protestant Churches, are as fairly disputed among themselves, witness the famous Controversie between the *Jansenists* and *Molinists*; which their infallible Judge never thought fit to determine to this day: They live indeed in the Communion of the same Church, notwithstanding these Disputes, because it is a very dangerous thing to leave it; but they are more beholden to the Inquisition, than to Infallibility for this Unity.

2. How do these Divisions and Heresies, which disturb the Church, prove that no man can be certain of his Religion? If we can certainly know what the sence of Scripture is, notwithstanding there are many different Opinions about it, then the diversity of Opinions is no Argument against us; if we cannot be certain of any thing, which others deny, dispute, or doubt of, then how can any Papist be certain that his Church is infallible? For all the rest of the Christian Church deny this, and scorn their Pretensions to it. I may indeed safely acquiesce in the Determinations of an Infallible Judge, whom I am infallibly assured to be infallible, how many contrary Opinions soever there are in the World: But when Infallibility it self is the matter of the Dispute, and I have no infallible way to know whether there be any such thing, or where this Infallibility is seated, if diversity of Opinions be an Argument against the certainty of any thing, which I am not, and cannot be infallibly assured of, then it is a certain demonstration against Infallibility it self.

Unless we will take the Church of *Rome*'s word for her own Infalli-

Infallibility, we cannot have the Decision of an Infallible Judge in this matter; for she will allow no other Infallible Judge, but her self: and yet this is so absurd a way, that it supposes, that we believe, and that we dis-believe the same thing at the same time. For unless we before-hand believe the Church to be infallible, her saying so, is no infallible proof that she is infallible; and yet the very demand of a proof, supposes that we are not certain of it, that we doubt of it, or dis-believe it. When we ask the Church, whether she be infallible, it supposes that we are not certain of it, otherwise we should need no proof; and when we believe the Church to be infallible, because she says so, it supposes, that we did before-hand believe that she is infallible, otherwise her saying so is no proof.

The greatest Champions for the Church of *Rome*, never pretended that they could produce any infallible proofs, which is the true Church. Cardinal *Bellarmine* attempts no more, than to alledge some Motives of Credibility, to make the thing probable, and to incline men to believe it; and yet it is impossible we can be more certain of the Infallibility of the Church, than we are, that it is a true Church; and if a Papist have onely some Motives of Credibility, to believe the Church of *Rome* to be a true Church, he can have no greater probabilities, that it is an infallible Church.

Now not to take notice what a tottering Foundation some high probabilities, though they amounted to a moral assurance, is for the belief of Infallibility, which is to put more in the Conclusion than there is in the Premises. The onely use I shall make of it at present, is this: That we can at least be as certain of the meaning of Scripture, as the Papists are, that their Church is infallible; for they can be no more infallibly assured of this, than we are of our interpretations of Scripture: and therefore if the diversity of Opinions about the sence of Scriptures, proves that we cannot be certain what the true sence of it is, the same Argument proves, that they cannot be certain that their Church is infallible, because this is not onely doubted, but absolutely denied by the greatest part of the Christian World, and was never thought of by the best and purest Ages of it. So that this Argument proves too much, and recoils upon themselves, like a Gun which is over-charged; and if, for their own sakes, they will grant that we may be certain of some things, which

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are as confidently denied, and disputed by others; then the diversity of Opinions in the Church, is no Argument, that we cannot be certain of our Religion, but onely teaches us greater Caution, and Diligence, and Honesty, in our Inquiries after Truth.

3. These Divisions and Heresies that are in the Christian Church, are no better Argument against the truth and certainty of our Religion, than the diversities of Religions that are in the World, are against the truth of Christianity. The whole World is far enough from being Christian; great part of it are *Jews*, or *Pagans*, or *Mahumetans* still; and this is as good an Argument to prove the uncertainty of all Religions, as the different Parties and Professions of Christians are to prove, that we cannot be certain, what the true Christian Church, nor what true Christianity is. The Gospel of our Saviour was not designed to offer any force or violence to mens Faith or Understanding, no more than to their Wills. Were there such an irresistible and compulsory Evidence in the Gospel, that wherever it were preach'd, it should be impossible for any man, though never so wicked and ill-disposed, to continue an Infidel, or to prove a Heretick, Faith would be no greater a Virtue, than forc'd Obedience and Compliance is. The Gospel has Evidence enough to convince honest Minds, and is plain enough to be understood, by those who are honest and teachable; and therefore has its Effects upon those who are curable: which is all that it was designed for. Those who will not believe, may continue Infidels; and those who will not understand, may fall into Errours, and believe a Lye: and yet there is Evidence enough to convince, and Plainness enough to instruct well-disposed Minds, and Certainty enough in each to be the Foundation of a Divine Faith.

The sum is this: Though the Instructions of the Church are a very good means for the understanding of the sence of Scripture, yet they are not the onely means; the Holy Scripture is a very intelligible Book in such matters as are absolutely necessary to Salvation; and could we suppose, that a man, who had never heard of a Church, should have the use of the Bible, in a Language which he understood, by a diligent reading of it, he might understand enough to be saved.

2. If by Church is meant any particular Church, as suppose

pose the *Roman* Catholick Church, or the Church of the present Age, it is absolutely false to say, that the Church, in this sence, is always a sure and safe means of understanding the Scripture. What has been universally believed by all Christian Churches, in all Ages, or at least by all Churches of the first and purest Ages of Christianity, which were nearest the times of the Apostles, and might be presumed best to understand the sence of the Apostles in the great Articles of our Faith, is a very safe Rule for the interpretation of Scripture; and the general Practice of those Primitive Apostolick Churches, in matters of Government and Discipline, before they were corrupted by worldly Ambition, and secular Interests is a very safe Rule for our Practice also; and this is the Rule whereby our Church is reformed, and to which we appeal.

There are but three things necessary to be understood by Christians; either the Articles of Faith, or the Rules of Life, or the external Order and Discipline of the Church, and Administration of Religious Offices.

1. As for the Rules of Life, all those Duties which we owe to God and Men, they are so plainly contained in the Holy Scriptures, that no honest man can mistake them; I suppose the Church of *Rome* her self, will not pretend that there is any need of an infallible Interpreter to teach men what is meant by Loving God with all our Heart, and our Neighbour as our selves.

2. As for the Articles of Faith, those which are Fundamental to the Christian Religion, and which every Christian ought to believe, are so plain in Scripture, that every honest and unprejudiced man may understand them; but however, as I observed before, we govern our selves in these things by the received Doctrine of the Catholick Church of the first and purest Ages, and if this be not a safe Rule, we can be certain of nothing. And what the Catholick Faith was, we learn from those short summaries of Faith, which were universally owned by all Catholick Churches. For what we now call the Apostles Creed, was very anciently received in all Churches, with some little variety indeed of Words and Phrase, but without any difference of sence; and the Catholick Faith was not only preserved in such short Summaries and Creeds, which were as liable to be perverted by

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Hereticks, as the Scriptures themſelves, but was more largely explained in the Writings of the ancient Fathers; and though this will not inable us to underſtand every Phraſe and Expreſſion of Scripture, but we muſt uſe other means to do that, as Skill in the Original Languages, a knowledge of ancient Cuſtoms, and ancient Diſputes, to which the Apoſtles frequently allude a conſideration of the Scope and Deſigne of the place, *&c.* Yet the Catholick Faith received and owned by the Primitive Church, is ſo far a Rule, as it directs us to Expound Scripture to a true Catholick ſence. As St. *Paul* commands the *Romans*, that thoſe who propheſie, ſhould propheſie according to the proportion of Faith, *Rom.* 12. 6. κατ' ἀναλογίαν πίστεως, according to the Analogy of Faith: That is, that in the interpreting the Scriptures of the Old Teſtament, they ſhould expound them to a Chriſtian ſence, according to thoſe Doctrines of the Chriſtian Faith, which he had taught them; and this was a ſafe Rule for expounding the Old Teſtament, which contained the Types, and Figures, and Propheſies of the Goſpel-State. And thus in expounding the New Teſtament, now it is committed to Writing, we muſt propheſie according to the Analogy of Faith, or as he commands *Timothy* in his Preaching, hold faſt the form of ſound words, which thou haſt heard from me, 2 *Tim.* 1. 13. It ſeems the Apoſtle had given him a form of ſound words, according to which, he was to direct his Preaching: whether this refers to a ſhort ſummary of Faith, ſuch as our Creed is, I cannot ſay, though it is not improbable it may; but it is plain, we have a form of ſound words delivered to us by the Catholick Church, which contains the true Catholick Faith, and therefore ought to be ſo far a Rule to us in expounding Scripture, as never to contradict any thing which is contained in it, for that is to contradict the Faith of the Catholick Church.

And when one great Article of this Faith, concerning the Eternal God-head of Chriſt the Son of God, was corrupted by *Arius*, a Presbyter of the Church of *Alexandria*, it gave an occaſion for a more full Declaration of the ſence of the Catholick Church about it. And though the effects of that Controverſie were very fatal to the Church, yet it was very happy that it broke out in ſuch an Age, when it could be determined with greater certainty and greater Authority, than it could have been

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in any ſucceeding Age of the Church; by men, who were venerable for their Age, for their Wiſdom, for their Piety, for their undaunted Confeſſions under heathen and perſecuting Emperours, who knew what the ſence of the Catholick Church was, before this Controverſie broke out, and before External Proſperity had, through eaſe and wantonneſs, corrupted the Faith, as well as the Manners of Chriſtians.

3. As for matters of External Order, Diſcipline, and Government, the Univerſal Practice of the Catholick Church is the beſt and ſafeſt Comment on thoſe general Rules and Directions we have laid down in Scripture. There is no doubt at all, but the Apoſtles did appoint Governours, and Rules of Order and Diſcipline, in the Churches planted by them; what theſe were, the Chriſtians of thoſe days ſaw with their Eyes, in the daily Practice of the Church; and therefore the Apoſtles in thoſe Epiſtles which they wrote to their ſeveral Churches, did not give them ſo punctual and particular account of thoſe matters, which they ſo well knew before, but as occaſion ſerved, make onely ſome accidental mention of theſe things, and that in ſuch general terms, as were well enough underſtood by them, who knew the Practice of the Church in that Age, but it may be, cannot meerly by the force of the words, which may be capable of ſeveral Sences, be ſo certainly and demonſtratively determined to any one ſence (by us, who did not ſee what was done in thoſe days) as to avoid all poſſible Cavils of contentious men.

This has occaſioned thoſe diſputes concerning Infant Baptiſm, the ſeveral Orders and Degrees of Church-Governours, the Rites and Ceremonies of Religious Worſhip, and the like. Thoſe who lived in thoſe days, and ſaw what the Apoſtles did in theſe matters, could not doubt of theſe things, though it were not in expreſs words ſaid, that Infants ſhould be baptized with their Parents, or that Biſhops are a ſuperiour Order to Presbyters, and Presbyters to Deacons, or that it is lawful for the Governours of the Church to inſtitute and appoint ſome ſignificant Rites and Ceremonies, for the more decent and orderly Adminiſtration of Religious Offices. But becauſe there is not a preciſe and punctual account given of theſe matters, in the Writings of the Apoſtles, which there was no need of then, when theſe things were obvious to their very Senſes, ſome perverſe and unreaſonable Diſputers, who obſtinately reject all other

Evidence, will judge of these things just as they please themselves, and alter their Opinions and Fancies, as often as they please.

But now if there be any certain way to know what the practice of the Apostles was in these Cases, this is the best Comment we can possibly have on such Texts, as are not sufficiently plain and express without it. Now methinks any reasonable man must acknowledge, that the best way to understand the Practice of the Apostles, is from the Practice of the Catholick Church in succeeding Ages, especially while the memory of the Apostles was fresh, and the Church governed by Apostolical men; when we cannot reasonably suspect any deviation from the Primitive Practice: and this is the Rule which the Church of *England* owns in such matters, and by which she rejects and confutes both the Innovations and Corruptions of the Church of *Rome*, and the wild Pretences of Fanaticism.

So that we do in the most proper sence own the Belief and Practice of the Primitive Church, to be the best means for Expounding Scripture. We do not leave every man to Expound Scripture by a private Spirit, as our Adversaries of the Church of *Rome* reproach us; we adhere to the ancient Catholick Church, which the Church of *Rome* on one side, and the Fanaticks on the other, have forsaken: and though we reject the new invention of an infallible Judge, yet we are no Friends at all to Scepticism, but can give a more Rational account of our Faith, than the Church of *Rome* can.

Had we no other way of understanding the sence of Scripture, but by Propriety of the Language, and the Grammatical Construction of the Words, and the scope and designe of the Texts, their Connexion and Dependence on what goes before, and what follows, and such-like means as we use for the understanding any other Books of humane composition; I doubt not, but honest and diligent Inquirers might discover the true meaning of Scripture, in all the great Articles of our Faith; but yet this alone is a more uncertain way, and liable to the Abuses of Hereticks and Impostors. The *Socinians* are a famous Example, what Wit and Criticism will do to prevent the plainest Texts; and some other Sectaries are as plain a demonstration, what work Dulness, and Stupidity, and Enthusiasm, will make with Scripture; but when we have the practice of the Catholick Church, and an ancient and venerable summary of the Christian Faith,

Faith, which has been the common Faith of Christians in all Ages, to be our Rule in Expounding Scripture, though we may after all, mistake the sence of some particular Texts, yet we cannot be guilty of any great and dangerous mistakes.

This use the Church of *England* makes of the Catholick Church, in Expounding Scripture, that she Religiously maintains the ancient Catholick Faith, and will not suffer any man to Expound Scriptures in opposition to the ancient Faith and Practice of the Catholick Church.

But though the Belief and Practice of the Catholick Church be the best means of understanding the true sence of Scripture, yet we cannot affirm this of any particular Church, or of the Church of any particular Age, excepting the Apostolick Age, or those Ages which immediately succeeded the Apostles. Notwithstanding this, the Church of *Rome* may be no good Expositor of Scriptures; for the Church of *Rome*, though she usurp the name of the Catholick Church, as presuming her self to be the Head and Fountain of Catholick Unity, yet she is but a part of the Catholick Church, as the Church of *England*, and the Churches of *France* and *Holland* are; and has no more right to impose her Expositions of Scripture upon other Churches, than they have to impose upon her. If there happen any Controversie between them, it is not the Authority of either Church can decide it, but this must be done by an appeal to Scripture, and the sence of the Catholick Church in the first and purest Ages of it.

For when we say, that the Belief and Practice of the Catholick Church is the best means to find out the true sence of Scripture, we do not mean that the Church is the soveraign and absolute Judge of the sence of Scripture; but the meaning is, that those Churches which were founded by the Apostles, and received the Faith immediately from them, and were afterwards, for some Ages, governed by Apostolical men, or those who were taught by them, and convers'd with them, are the best Witnesses what the Doctrine of the Apostles was, and therefore as far as we can be certain, what the Faith of these Primitive Churches was, they are the best Guides for the Expounding Scripture.

So that the Authority of the Church in Expounding Scripture, being onely the Authority of Witnesses, it can reach no farther than those Ages, which may reasonably be presumed to be Authentick and Credible Witnesses of the Doctrine of the Apostles, and therefore if we extend it to the four first General

Councils, it is as far as we can do it with any pretence of Reason; and thus far the Church of *England* owns the Authority of the Church, and commands her Ministers to Expound the Scriptures according to the Catholick Faith, owned and profess'd in those days; but as for the latter Ages of the Church, which were removed too far from the Apostles days, to be Witnesses of their Doctrine, they have no more Authority in this matter, than we have at this day, nor has one Church any more Authority than another.

3. And therefore, if by the Church being the means of knowing the sence and meaning of the Holy Scriptures, be understood the Judgment and Sentence, and Decree of the Church, that we must seek no farther for the reason of our Faith, than the infallible Authority of the Church, in Expounding Scripture, this also is absolutely false and absurd.

This is more than Christ and his Apostles assumed to themselves, while they were on Earth; they were indeed infallible Interpreters of Scripture, but yet they never bore down their Hearers meerly with their Authority, but Expounded the Scriptures, and applied ancient Prophesies to their Events, and took the Vail off of *Moses*'s Face, and shewed them the Gospel-state concealed under those Types and Figures; they confirmed their Expositions of Scripture by the force of Reason, and appealed to the Judgments and Consciences of their Hearers, whether these things were not so; Christ commands the *Jews* not meerly to take his own word, and to rely on his Authority for the truth of what he said, but to study the Scriptures themselves; and the *Bereans* are commended for this generous temper of mind, that they were more noble than those of *Thessalonica*, for they daily searcht the Scriptures, to see whether the Doctrine the Apostles preach'd were to be found there or not? Now I think no Church can pretend to be more infallible than Christ and his Apostles, and therefore, certainly ought not to assume more to themselves than they did; and if the Church of *Rome*, or any other Church, will convince us of the truth of their Expositions of Scripture, as Christ and his Apostles convinc'd their Hearers, that is, by inlightning our Understandings, and convincing our Judgments by proper Arguments, we will gladly learn of them.

This course the Primitive Christians took, as is evident in all the Writings of the ancient Fathers against *Jews* and *Hereticks*; they

they argue from the Scriptures themſelves to prove what the ſence of Scripture is; they appeal indeed ſometimes to the ſence of the Catholick Church, not as an infallible Judge of Scripture, but as the beſt Witneſſes of the Apoſtolical Doctrine: Thus *Tertullian* argues againſt Hereticks, in his Book *De Præſcriptionibus*; but when they reaſon about the ſence of Scripture, they never direct us to any infallible Judge, but uſe ſuch Arguments, as they think proper to convince Gain-ſayers.

Nay, this is the way which was obſerved in all the ancient Councils; the Biſhops of the Church met together for Common Counſel and Advice, and in matters of Diſcipline and Government, which were ſubject to their Authority, they conſidered what was moſt for the publick benefit of the Church, and determined them by their Authority, not as infallible Judges, but as ſupreme Governours of the Church. In the Diſputes of Faith, they reaſon from Scripture, and the ſence of the Catholick Church, not from their own Authority; and what upon a ſerious debate and inquiry they found to be moſt agreeable to the ſence of Scripture, and the Doctrine of the Church of former Ages, that they determined and decreed to be received in all Churches, as the Catholick Faith. That this is ſo, is evident from all the Hiſtories of the moſt ancient and celebrated Councils, which any man may conſult, who pleaſes.

Now I would ask ſome few Queſtions about this matter. 1. Whether theſe Councils took a ſure and ſafe way to find out Truth? If they did not, what reaſon have we to believe that they determined right? If they did, then we may uſe the ſame way which they did: for that which is a good way in one Age, is ſo another, and then there is no neceſſity of an Infallible Judge to find out the ſence of Scripture, becauſe we have other certain ways of doing this; the ſame which all the ancient Councils obſerved.

2. I would know, whether it be not ſufficient for every Chriſtian to receive the Decrees and Determinations of theſe Councils, upon the ſame Reaſon and Authority which moved the Fathers aſſembled in Council to make theſe Decrees? Whether, for inſtance, we muſt not believe the Eternal God-head of Chriſt, and that he is of the ſame ſubſtance with his Father, for the ſame Reaſons for which the *Nicene* Fathers believed this, and required all Chriſtians to believe it? If we muſt, then Scripture, and the ſence of the Catholick Church, not the Authority

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of a General Council, or any Infallible Judge, is the Reason of our Faith: For the *Nicene* Fathers, who were the first that met in a General Council, could not believe this, upon the Authority of any other General Council, much less upon their own Authority; unless we will say, that they first decreed this, then believed it, because they themselves decreed it. If Scripture, and the sence of the Catholick Church, antecedently to the determinations of a General Council, or any other pretended Infallible Judge, be not a sufficient foundation for our Faith, then the whole Christian World, before the Council of *Nice*, which was the first General Council, had no sufficient foundation for their Faith; for there was no particular Bishop or Church in those days, which pretended to be the Infallible Interpreter of Scriptures. We Protestants have the same way to understand the Scriptures, have the same Reason and Foundation of our Faith, which the *Nicene* Fathers themselves had, or which any Christian could have, before there was any General Council; and if the Church of *Rome* do not think this enough, we cannot help that, we are abundantly satisfied with it.

The Authority of a General Council in those days, was deservedly sacred and venerable, not as an Infallible Judge, which they never pretended to, but as the most certain means they could possibly have to understand what was, and in all Ages had been the received Doctrine of the Catholick Church. They met together not to make new Articles of Faith, which no Council in the World ever had any Authority to do, but to declare what was the truly ancient and Apostolick Faith; and to put it into such words as might plainly express the Catholick sence, and meet with the Distempers of that Age.

For this end Grave and Reverend Bishops assembled from all parts of the Christian World, not meerly to give their private Opinions of things, but to declare what was the received Doctrine of those Churches over which they presided; and I know no better Argument of an Apostolick Tradition, than the consent of all Churches, as remote from each other, as East and West, which were planted by several Apostles, and differed very much from each other, in some External Rites and Usages, but yet all agreed in the same Faith. And this is the true Authority of those ancient Councils, that they were most likely to understand the true sence of Scripture, and of the Catholick Church. This is the Protestant Resolution of Faith, and the *Nicene* Fathers them-

themſelves had no other way, nor pretended to any other.

Nay, the Church of *Rome* her ſelf, as much as ſhe talks of Infallibility, makes very little uſe of it. She has never given us an infallible Comment on Scripture, but ſuffers her Doctors to write as fallible Comments, and in many things as contrary to each other, as any Proteſtant Divines do: And I cannot imagine what good Infallibility does, if an infallible Church has no better means of underſtanding Scripture, than the Comments of fallible men: that is, no better means than every fallible Church has: for no man can underſtand the Scripture ever the better for the Churches being infallible, unleſs this infallible Church improve this glorious Talent of Infallibility in Expounding Scripture; which ſhe has not done to this day, and I believe never will.

Indeed it is apparent, that Infallibility, as it is pretended to by the Church of *Rome*, can be of no uſe, either in the Reſolution of Faith, or in Confuting Hereticks, who deny this Infallibility; and then I cannot imagine what it is good for, but to multiply Diſputes, inſtead of ending them.

As for the Reſolution of Faith; ſuppoſe I ask a Papiſt, Why he believes ſuch Articles, as the Divinity of Chriſt, or the Reſurrection of the Dead, to be contained in Scripture? If he anſwers, as he muſt do, Becauſe he is taught ſo by the Church, which is infallible: my next Queſtion is, How he knows the Church to be infallible? If he ſays he learns this from Scripture, I ask him how he comes to underſtand the Scripture, and how he knows that this is the ſence of it? If he knows this by the infallible interpretation of the Church, then he runs round in a Circle, and knows the Scripture by the Church, and the Church by the Scripture, as I obſerved before; if he can find out the Churches Infallibility by the Scripture, without the help of an infallible Judge, then it ſeems the Scripture is to be underſtood without the infallible interpretation of the Church; and if men can find out Infallibility in Scripture, without the Church, I am confident they may find out any thing elſe in Scripture as well, without the Churches Infallibility: for there is no Article of our Creed ſo hard to be found there, as the Churches Infallibility is. But however that be, after all this boaſt of Infallibility, a Papiſt has no more infallible Foundation for his Faith, than a Proteſtant has, nor half ſo much. We believe the Articles of the Chriſtian Faith, becauſe we find them plainly taught in

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Scripture, and universally received as the sence of Scripture by the Catholick Church in the best and purest Ages of it: A Papist believes the Church to be infallible, because he thinks he finds it in Scripture, though the Catholick Church for many Ages never found it there, and the greatest part of the Christian Church to this day cannot find it there: Now if they will but allow, that a Protestant (though a poor fallible Creature) may reason about the sence of Scripture, as well as a Papist, and that the evidence of Reason is the same to both, then we Protestants stand upon as firm ground as the Papists here, and are at least as certain of all those Doctrines of Faith, which we find in the Scripture, and are ready to prove by it, as they are of their Churches Infallibility; but then we have an additional Security, that we expound the Scriptures right, which they want, and that is the Doctrine and Practice of the Primitive Church, which confirms all the Articles of our Faith, and Rules of Worship and Discipline, but gives not the least intimation, that the Pope or Church of *Rome* was thought infallible by them; and if the Primitive Church was ignorant of this, which is the best Witness of Apostolical Tradition, it is most probable, that no such thing is contained in Scripture, though some mercenary Flatterers of the Pope have endeavoured to perswade the World, that they found it there.

So that we have a greater assurance of all the Articles of our Religion, from Scripture and Catholick Tradition, than a Papist can have of the Churches Infallibility, and yet he can have no greater assurance of any other Doctrines of Religion, which he believes upon the Churches Infallibility, than he has of Infallibility it self. So that in the last Resolution of Faith, the Protestant has much the advantage of the Papist, for the Protestant resolves his Faith into the Authority of the Scriptures, Expounded by the Doctrine and Practice of the Primitive Church; the Papists resolves his into the Infallibility of the Church, which he finds out onely by Expounding Scripture by a private Spirit, without the Authority of any Church, but that whose Authority is under dispute.

And as the Doctrine of Infallibility is of no use in the last Resolution of Faith, so it is wholly useless in disputing with such Hereticks as we are; who deny Infallibility: for it is a vain thing to attempt to impose any absurd, or groundless, and uncatholick Doctrines upon us, by the Churches infallible Autho-

rity,

rity, who believe there is no ſuch infallible Judge; but are reſolved to truſt our own Eyes, and to adhere to Scripture and the Catholick Faith of the Primitive Church in theſe matters.

And therefore the great Advocates for the Church of *Rome*, are forced to take the ſame courſe in confuting Hereſies, as they call them, that we do: They alledge the Authority of Scripture, the Authority of Fathers and Councils, to juſtifie their Innovations, and here we willingly joyn iſſue with them, and are ready to prove, That Scripture and all true Antiquity is on our ſide; and this has been often and unanſwerably proved by the Learned Patrons of the Reformation.

But there are ſome very material things to be obſerved from hence, for our preſent purpoſe. For either they think this a good way to prove what they intend, and to convince Gainſayers by the Authority of Scripture, and Primitive Antiquity, or they do not. If they do not think this a good way, to what purpoſe are there ſo many Volumes of Controverſie written? Why do they produce Scripture, and Fathers, and Councils, to juſtifie the Uſurpations of their Church, and theſe new Additions they have made to the Chriſtian Faith and Worſhip? If this be not a good way to convince Hereticks, why do they give themſelves and us ſuch an impertinent trouble?

If this be a good way, then we are in a good way already; we take that very way for our ſatisfaction, which by their own Confeſſion and Practice, is a very proper means for the Conviction of Hereticks, and to diſcover the Truth, and after the moſt diligent inquiries we can make, we are ſatisfied that the Truth is on our ſide.

If the Authority of Scripture ſignifie any thing in this matter, then it ſeems Hereticks, who reject the Authority of an Infallible Judge, may underſtand Scripture without an Infallible Interpreter, by the Exerciſe of Reaſon and Judgment in ſtudying of them, otherwiſe why do they pretend to expound Scripture to us, and to convince us by Reaſon and Argument, what the true ſence of Scripture is.

If the Authority of the Primitive Church, and firſt Chriſtian Writers, be conſiderable, (as they acknowledge it is, by their appeals to them) then at leaſt, the preſent Pope or Church, is not the ſole infallible Judge of Controverſies, unleſs they will ſay, that we muſt not judge of the Doctrine or Practice of the Primitive Church, by ancient Records (and then *Baronius* his Annals

nals are worth nothing) but by the Judgment and Practice of the present Church.

The sum is this: There is great reason to suspect, that the Church of *Rome* her self, does not believe her own Infallibility, no more than we Protestants do: for if she does, she ought not to suffer her Doctors to dispute with Hereticks, from any other Topick, but her own Authority; when they vie Reasons and Arguments with us, and dispute from Scripture and Antiquity: they appeal from the infallibility of the present Church, to every mans private Reason and Judgment, as much as any Protestant does: and if the Articles of the Christian Faith may be establish'd by Scripture and Antiquity, without an infallible Judge, as they suppose they may be, by their frequent attempts to do it; this plainly overthrows the necessity of an infallible Judge. In a word, not to take notice now how weak and groundless this pretence of Infallibility is, it is evident that it is a very useless Doctrine: for those who believe the Churches Infallibility, have no greater assurance of their Faith, than we have, who do not believe it; and those who do not believe the Churches Infallibility, can never be confuted by it. So that it can neither establish any mans Faith, nor confute any Heresies; that is, it is of no use at all.

The Church of *England* reverences the Authority of the Primitive Church, as the best Witness of the Apostolical Faith and Practice, but yet resolves her Faith at last into the Authority of the Scriptures. She receives nothing for an Article of Faith, which she does not find plainly enough taught in Scripture, but it is a great confirmation of her interpretation of Scripture, that the Primitive Church owned the same Doctrines which she does; and she looks upon it as a just prejudice against any Expositions of Scripture, if they contradict the common Faith of the first Christians: and therefore when the words of Scripture are fairly capable of different senses, she chuses that sence which is most agreeable with the Catholick Faith and Practice of the Primitive Church; but should any Doctrines be imposed upon her, as Articles of Faith, which are no where to be found in Scripture, or which are plainly contrary to it, (as the new *Trent*-Creed is) whatever pretence there be for the Antiquity of such Doctrines, she utterly rejects them; she will not put out her own Eyes to follow any other Guide; and thanks be to God, she needs not reject any truly Catholick Doctrine in this way. We

still

ſtill retain the Faith of the Primitive Church, and are greatly confirmed in it, from that admirable conſent there is between the Scriptures, as Expounded by us, and that Faith which was anciently owned and received by all Chriſtians.

Having thus ſhewn in what ſence the Church is the Interpreter of Scripture, I proceed now to the ſecond thing contained in this Paper, That this Church muſt be known to be the true Church, by its continual viſible ſucceſſion from Chriſt till our days. Now theſe few words contain a great many, and very great miſtakes: The ſubject of the Inquiry is, how we may find out ſuch a Church, whoſe word we may ſafely take for the true ſence and meaning of Scripture.

Now, 1. The Author of this Paper, whether ignorantly, or deſignedly, I know not, alters the ſtate of the Queſtion, and inſtead of a Church, which is an unerring and infallible Interpreter of Scripture, which would be very well worth finding, he tells us how we may know a true Church: now I take a true Church, and an Infallible Interpreter of Scripture, to be very different things. A Church may be guilty of Schiſm and Hereſie, and yet may be a true Church, though not a ſound, Orthodox, and Catholick Church: for a true Church is ſuch a Church as has all things neceſſary, and eſſential to the Being and Conſtitution of a Church; this a Church may have, and ſuperadd other things which are deſtructive of the Chriſtian Faith, and very dangerous and fatal miſtakes; as we believe, and are able to prove the Church of *Rome* has done: and yet we acknowledge her a true Church, becauſe ſhe retains the true Chriſtian Faith, though miſerably corrupted by Additions of her own, as a man is a true man, though he be ſick of a mortal Diſeaſe. Now if a true Church may corrupt the Chriſtian Faith, we have no reaſon to rely on the Authority of every true Church, for the true ſence and meaning of Scripture.

2. Let us ſuppoſe, that by a true Church, he means an Infallible Church, whoſe Authority we may ſafely rely on in Expounding Scriptures; this Church, he ſays, is to be known by a continual viſible ſucceſſion from Chriſt, till our days: Now if this viſible uninterrupted ſucceſſion be the mark of ſuch a true Church, as is an infallible Interpreter of Scripture; then, 1. The *Greek* Church, as an infallible Interpreter of Scripture: for ſhe has as viſible and uninterrupted a ſucceſſion from Chriſt and his Apoſtles to this day, as the Church of *Rome* has; and ſo we

have two infallible Churches (not to instance in any more at present, who have as good a succession as either of them) which are directly opposite to each other; and what shall we do in this case? Must we believe Contradictions, or must we dis-believe infallible Churches?

2. If a visible succession from Christ and his Apostles, makes any Church an infallible Interpreter of Scripture, then all the Churches which were planted by the Apostles, were infallible. All the Churches which were planted by the Apostles, have an equally-visible succession from Christ; those Churches which were planted by the Apostles, may be presumed as Infallible, while the Apostles were present with them, as they were afterwards; and those Churches which succeeded these Apostolical Churches, at the distance of an Age or two, may be supposed as infallible as any Church of this Age is: for if a visible succession from Christ makes a Church infallible, why should not a succession of a hundred or two hundred years, make them as infallible as a succession of sixteen hundred years? unless they think that Infallibility increases with the Age of the Church, which I could wish true, but we see very little sign of it. Now according to these Principles, all the Churches, which were planted by the Apostles, and have a continual visible succession from Apostolical Churches, through all Ages, since the time of the Apostles, must be infallible: for if a continual visible succession confers Infallibility, and is the mark whereby we must know it, then every Church which ever had, or has to this day this visible succession, must have Infallibility also, which, it seems, is entailed on succession. And thus we have found out a world of Infallibility, and it is wonderful how any Apostolical Church came to be over-run with so many Errours and Heresies, and to grow so corrupt and degenerate, as to provoke God to root them up; if every Apostolical Church was infallible, I cannot imagine how whole Churches, which visibly succeeded the Apostles, should be infected with Heresie: for if Infallibility it self will not secure a Church from Heresie, the Lord have mercy upon us.

3. This mark he gives how to find out such a true Church as is an infallible Interpreter of Scripture, *viz.* A continual visible succession from Christ till this day, includes another great mistake: for it supposes, that there is some Church now in being, on whose Authority we must rely for the sence of Scripture; for otherwise there can be no use of a visible succession to this day,

day, in this Controverſie: If, as I have already proved at large, we muſt rely onely on the Authority of the Primitive Church, not of the Church of this preſent Age, for the ſence of Scripture, and that not as an infallible Judge, but as the moſt Authentick Witneſs of the Apoſtolical Doctrine and Practice, then we cannot find out this Church by a viſible ſucceſſion to this day, but by examining the ancient Records of the Primitive Church, where we ſhall find what the Faith and Practice of the Church in thoſe days was, which is the ſafeſt Rule to guide us in the Expoſition of Scripture. Though there were no Church in the World at this day, which could prove a continual viſible ſucceſſion from Chriſt and his Apoſtles, yet while we have the Scriptures, and the Records of the Primitive Church, we have very ſufficient means for the underſtanding the true meaning of Scripture: ſo that of whatever uſe this talk of a continual viſible ſucceſſion may be in other caſes, it is wholly impertinent in this. A Church which cannot prove ſuch a continual viſible ſucceſſion which was not founded by any Apoſtle, or Apoſtolical men, or has loſt the Memory or Records of its firſt Plantation, may yet have very certain means of knowing the true ſence of Scripture, from the Scripture it ſelf, and the Doctrine and Practice of Apoſtolical and Primitive Churches, and a Church which has the moſt viſible uninterrupted ſucceſſion from Chriſt and his Apoſtles, may be ſo far from being an infallible Interpreter of Scripture, that ſhe may be very corrupt and erroneous her ſelf, if ſhe forſake the Apoſtolical Tradition contained in the Writings of the New Teſtament, and expounded by the Catholick Faith and Practice of the firſt Churches; as we know the Church of *Rome* has done; which is ſo far from being an infallible Church, that we believe her to be the moſt corrupt Church in the World.

And thus I think we are prepared to venture upon the laſt Clauſe of this Paper, wherein the whole force of the Argument, ſuch as it is, is turned upon the poor Proteſtant Churches. But I doubt (ſays the Author of this Paper) whether or no the Proteſtant Church can make out this continual viſible ſucceſſion, and deſire to be informed. The ſting of which Argument lies in this, that we Proteſtants have no certain way of knowing the true ſence and meaning of Scripture, becauſe we cannot prove the continual viſible ſucceſſion of our Church, from Chriſt unto this day; and therefore we ought to go over to the Church of *Rome*, who

who has this visible succession, and receive all her Dictates as infallible Oracles. But, for Answer to this, consider,

1. That suppose the Protestant Church could not make out such a continual visible succession, yet we may understand the Scriptures very well without it, and need not go to the Church of *Rome* to Expound Scripture for us, as I have already shewn at large. Had he proved that we had been no Church, for want of a visible succession of Church-Officers, or that our Religion were a Novelty, which was never heard of in the World before *Luther*, this had been something more to the purpose; but to pretend that we cannot understand the Scriptures, for want of a visible succession, is such a loose and inconsequent way of reasoning, as a poor fallible Protestant would be ashamed of.

2. But pray, why can't the Protestant Church of *England* prove her continual visible succession from Christ till this day, as well as the Church of *Rome*? Here was a Christian Church planted in this Nation, as very good Historians say, as early as at *Rome*, and it has continued here ever since, to this day: when *Austin* the Monk came over to *England*, he found here a company of resolute *British* Bishops and Monks, who would not submit to the Usurpations of *Rome*; and the *English* and *British* Churches under several Changes and Alterations, have continued to this day, with a visible succession of Christian Bishops: and what better succession can *Rome* shew than this?

I suppose no *Roman* Catholick will disown the succession of the Church of *England*, till the Reformation, and I pray, how came we to lose our succession then? Did the Reformation of those Abuses and Corruptions, which had crept into the Church, unchurch us? Just as much as a man ceases to be the same man, when he is cured of some mortal Disease: Did not the Church of *England* consist of the same Persons, before the Reformation and after? A great many indeed disowned the Reformation; but were not all those Persons, who were so active and zealous in the Reformation, formerly of the *Roman* Communion? And did they lose their succession too, when they became Reformers? When a Church Consists of the same Bishops, Priests, and People, which she had before, though she have not all the same that she had; when she retains the same ancient Catholick and Apostolick Faith which she did before, onely renounces some Errours and Innovations which she owned before, how does this forfeit her succession? The Church of

England

England is the very ſame Church now, ſince the Reformation, which ſhe was before, and therefore has the very ſame ſucceſſion, though not the ſame Errours, to this day, that ever ſhe had; and that, I think, is as good a ſucceſſion as the Church of *Rome* has.

There are but two things to be conſidered in the caſe of Succeſſion: Either a ſucceſſion of Church-Officers, or a ſucceſſion of the Faith and Doctrines of the Church.

1. As for a ſucceſſion of Church-Officers, we have the ſame that the Church of *Rome* has. Thoſe *Engliſh* Biſhops who embraced the Reformation, received their Orders in the Communion of the Church of *Rome*, and therefore they had as good Orders, as any are in the Church of *Rome*; and theſe were the Perſons who Conſecrated other Biſhops, and ſo in ſucceſſion to this day. For as for the ſtory of the Nags-Head Ordination, that is ſo tranſparent a Forgery, invented many years after, to reproach the Reformation, that I preſume no ſober *Roman* Catholick will inſiſt on it.

But we are Hereticks and Schiſmaticks, and this forfeits our Orders and our Succeſſion together. But, 1. This Charge ought firſt to be proved againſt us, that we are Hereticks and Schiſmaticks; we deny and abhor both the name and thing: and if we be not Hereticks, and Schiſmaticks, as we are ſure we are not, and as the Church of *Rome* can never prove us to be, then according to their own Confeſſion, our Orders muſt be good.

2. However, be we Hereticks, or Schiſmaticks, or whatever they pleaſe to call us, how does this deſtroy our Orders and Succeſſion? The Catholick Church would not allow in former Ages, that Hereſie or Schiſm deſtroyed the validity of Orders. St. *Jerome* diſputes againſt this at large, in his Book *Contra Luciferianos*. And St. *Auſtin* allows the *Donatiſts* Biſhops to have valid Orders, though they were Schiſmaticks, and therefore that the Sacraments adminiſtred by them, were valid. And indeed, if Hereſie will deſtroy Orders and Succeſſion, the Church of *Rome* will be as much to ſeek for their Orders and Succeſſion, as we are, which, by their own Confeſſion, have had ſeveral Heretical Popes, and no body knows how many Biſhops Ordained by them.

2. As for ſucceſſion of Doctrine, which is as conſiderable to the full, as ſucceſſion of Orders, the great Articles of our Faith are not onely plainly contained in Scripture, but have been delivered

vered down to us, through all Ages of the Church, by an uninterrupted Succeſſion.

The Church of *Rome* her ſelf in her greateſt Degeneracy, did own all that we do in pure matters of Faith: When we reformed the Church, we did not make a new Religion, but only ſeparated the old Faith from new and corrupt Additions; and therefore the Quarrel of the Church of *Rome* with us, is not that we believe any thing which they do not believe, but that we do not believe all that they would have us.

The Doctrine of the Church of *England* is truly Primitive and Catholick, taught by Chriſt and his Apoſtles, owned by the Primitive Church, and excepting the Diſpute between the *Latin* and *Greek* Church, about the *Filioque*, or the Holy Spirits proceeding from the Father and the Son, received by all Catholick Churches to this day; which is as compleat and perfect Succeſſion, as any Doctrine can have: therefore when the Church of *Rome* asks us, Where was our Religion before *Luther*? We tell them, it was all the World over; all Catholick Churches believed what we do, though we do not believe all that they do: they themſelves did, and do to this Day, own our Creeds, and Articles of Faith, excepting ſuch of them as are directly oppoſed to their Innovations.

So that we are on a ſure Foundation, our Faith has been received in the Catholick Church in all Ages. But now the Church of *Rome* cannot ſhew ſuch a Succeſſion for her new Doctrines and Articles of Faith, which were unknown to the Primitive Church for many Ages, which were rejected by many flouriſhing Churches, ſince the firſt appearance of them, which never had a quiet poſſeſſion in her own Communion, and were never formed into Articles of Faith, till the packt Conventicle of *Trent*.

This I think is a ſufficient Anſwer to this Paper, and it pities me to ſee ſo many well-meaning Perſons abuſed with ſuch tranſparent Sophiſtry.

FINIS.